LAURIE CARROLL INTERVIEW

by Samuel Claesson

Although not a household name among filmgoers, Laurie Carroll had an impressive career that included starring roles in Hollywood and on Broadway. Born as Lois Cohen in Cambridge, MA, after graduating from Fairfax High she flew to New York City to audition for "Plain and Fancy", which she starred in for several months. With ambitions to be an operatic singer, she gave it up to pursue a career as an actress. Discovered by Arthur Godfrey, host of the long-running TV series "Talent Scouts", he arranged her first nationally-broadcast performance on July 18, 1955, which got rave reviews. She got steady work in Hollywood, appearing on "The Johnny Carson Show" where Sam Katzman saw her performance and subsequently cast her as Della in "Rumble on the Docks" ('56). It's strange that an operatic singer would do Westerns, but that's exactly what happened. She did several including "Maverick", "State Trooper", "26 Men", "Broken Arrow", "Rin Tin Tin" and "Tales of the Texas Rangers". Currently, she lives peacefully in the suburbs of Craven County, NC with her friend Judith.

Q: You did several genres on television, but you were a familiar face in Westerns.

LC: We used to say if you didn't do Westerns, you didn't work. If you read about a lot of the greatest actors of that era, they did Westerns. I think directors cast me in a lot of them because of my dark-brown hair. It's more believable to have a brunette in a Western than a blonde. The only disadvantage is that actresses are often limited to the damsel-in-distress saved by the handsome cowboy. It's a very different dynamic than how women are portrayed by directors like Alfred Hitchcock.

Q: Your first Western was "Maverick: Hostage". Describe your experience on set.

LC: It was the first of several roles where I was kidnapped. I worked a lot with James Garner in that, as we were both held hostage before being saved by Jack Kelly. It was a cute episode. Jack Kelly was a great actor who took his work seriously. He didn't socialize with me while we were filming, as he didn't wanna break character. James Garner was rugged, handsome, and had a great sense of humor. I should mention he wasn't legendary when we did "Maverick". He was still a newcomer. It wasn't until years later when he'd start doing films.

Q: How about "Shotgun Slade"? What was Scott Brady like?

LC: I was doing several projects when I was cast in it. Scott had been in the press lately because of an arrest and some issues with his marriage. I actually expected he'd ask me out. It wasn't uncommon for him to do that. He practically dated every actress in Hollywood. I always wondered why he never pursued me. I suppose I wasn't his type. I shared a scene with Johnny Cash in that episode, but I didn't know that until a few days ago when I was reading my credits. It was one of his earlier roles.

Q: You did an episode of "Broken Arrow" called "Turncoat", where you played Kodaysay. How did you prepare for the role of a Native-American woman?

Laurie Carroll as Kodaysay with H. M. Wynant in "Broken Arrow: Turncoat".

LC: I was given a copy of the script. I noticed the director wrote in the notes that they were of the Apache tribe. I went to the library and studied before the days of the internet. I found some books about the history of the Apache people. I imagine "Broken Arrow" isn't politically correct in our present culture, but I thought it was fine. It actually shows the Apache people as being heroes.

Q: You worked in Walt Disney's "Zorro" as a gypsy who gets kidnapped in a heist. What was it like on set in that iconic series?

LC: Ah, I sometimes get fan mail for that. It's amazing so many people still like "Zorro". Guy Williams helped me perfect the accent. The plot was that I was being forced to give the location of gold I brought with me before being rescued by Diego. Disney planned to do a film of it instead, but I don't think it ever happened.

Q: You did "Son of Sinbad" ('55) and the TV series "Tales of Wells Fargo", both with Dale Robertson. How would you describe him as a co-star?

Laurie Carroll in "Tales of Wells Fargo: The Gun" with Jeanette Nolan.

LC: He was a great conversationalist. Actually, he was that rare man who you could talk to about things you'd only talk to other women about. He was very kind, a good listener, and trustworthy. You could confide in him about something and he'd keep it to himself.

Q: You did three episodes of "Death Valley Days". How were you cast?

LC: I actually did five episodes of "Death Valley Days". It was great because it was an anthology series, so the cast wasn't consistent. That meant there were a lot of opportunities to have different actors in it. They kept having me come back. I did reject them once because I had another commitment, but I always tried to accommodate them, as they always had great scripts and a wide audience. I did an episode ["The Bullet and the Captain"] where I played the daughter of the man who runs a trading post for refugees. If I remember, "Death Valley Days" was the longest-running Western on television. (Actually, not. "Gunsmoke" ran 20 years while "Death Valley Days" lasted 18.—ed.)

Q: You portrayed Waa-Nibe, a Native-American, in the episode "The Big Rendezvous". It's one of the most popular episodes of the series. You've had similar roles which had Native-American and Latina ties. How did you feel about being cast as ethnic characters?

LC: One of the things I like about acting is the opportunity to learn about different kinds of people. When you're cast as a particular race or religion, you gotta learn about it. I felt blessed doing it. I was a Latina on "State Trooper"' and "26 Men". I was Arabic in "Son of Sinbad". There are actors who would love the opportunity to do that, and I *was* doing it.

Q: Why did you leave acting? Would you return to it if the opportunity arose?

LC: I got married and had a daughter, so I chose to focus on my family. It's not easy to be a working actress and start a family. When you do acting, you gotta put a lot into it. The same goes for parenting. Whether I'd return to acting depends on what's offered. I'd wanna do a role that has depth.

Q: What advice would you give to aspiring actors?

LC: I'd tell them to work hard and love what they're doing. There's a lot of competition, and you're sometimes competing with actors who have a lot more experience. That's why you gotta stand out. That's why you gotta prepare. That's why you gotta be easy to work with. The competition is incredible.

D'ja know:

Gene Autry and Dick Jones' leading lady in "Last of the Pony Riders", Kathleen Case, was the drunken driver whose car crashed into actor Dirk Rambo's car in Hollywood on 2/5/67 causing his death at 25 in the ensuing fire. An L.A. municipal court judge dismissed felony drunken driving and manslaughter charges against her, stating she was not at fault in the incident. Born Catherine Walker 7/31/33 in Pittsburgh, Case made her debut with the Metropolitan Opera Company at age 11. She traveled as a solo dancer with the San Carlo Opera Company until she signed with Columbia in '51. Case co-starred with Charles Starrett in "Junction City" ('52) and in "Last of the Pony Riders" ('53) as well as appearing on "Range Rider", "Kit Carson", "Hopalong Cassidy", "Sugarfoot" and in Bill Elliott's non-western "Calling Homicide" ('56). During her turbulent decade in Hollywood ('51-'61) Case had torrid affairs with actor Steve Rowland (born 9/3/32, best known for playing James Dean-like juveniles on TV westerns in the late '50s—including Phin Clanton on "Wyatt Earp") and, especially, Elvis Presley circa '57-'60, and Mexican politician Jose Castaneda. Her career ended after "Surfside 6" and "Hawaiian Eye" episodes in '61. She was virtually unheard of until the fiery crash that killed Dirk Rambo, Dack Rambo's twin brother. Case died at only 45 in L.A. on July 22, 1979.

D'ja notice:

Douglas Fowley used the "I'm your Huckleberry" phrase in Tim Holt's "Rider From Tucson" ('50 RKO) long before Val Kilmer voiced it in "Tombstone" ('93).

The B-Western Cowboy Credo

Duncan (Cisco Kid) Renaldo...

"I do love Westerns. The outdoor life appeals to me and they are good, clean entertainment for young and old alike."

Bob Steele...

"All I can say is that I enjoy my family. I play golf, I've been blessed with a good constitution, and I tend to mind my own business. I'm not a good person to ask about today's movies because I don't go to them."

Randolph Scott...

"Today's movies are so filthy that I wouldn't let Trigger watch them."

Roy Rogers...

"I avoid the stupid type of cowhand...I try to speak intelligently. The moment I start acting I'm out of character. Hoppy is part philosopher, part doctor, part minister...he's everything."

William (Hoppy) Boyd...

"I'm positive that a TV series based on the old Westerns—with plenty of fast action, thrills and suspense—would give today's kids a whole new crop of heroes. American kids today need heroes to respect and look up to."

Charles (Durango Kidd) Starrett...

"There's the Bible, and there is wrong and right in all of us. If, through the media of motion pictures and television, we can be stripped of the children's respect for the family circle, if we can be stripped of our belief in a Supreme Being or a hereafter, if we can be stripped of our heritage, of our belief in our country and any right things we might have done, if we can be stripped of our historical values, if they can get us to where we don't believe in anything, this whole country will fall apart like a bag of cookies. If we make a youngster think everybody's rotten, that everybody's bums, then what's he got to live for? Then he has no conscience, so he'll go out and rob a filling station. But you make him believe in a Supreme Being and a hereafter, and he has good moral conscience to adhere to, then his conscience will keep him straight."

Jimmy Wakely...

"It's gratifying I was able through all these years to give these youngsters an example, a decent example. I'm very pleased about that. They've turned it around. They've made the image something totally different. It's the tough guy who's the hero, not the fine upstanding fellow. And then the sickness that's coming into them now. Gracious, films are filled with nothing but filth and pornography and profanity. They have to fall back on that just to give people a thrill. Well heavens, it's no thrill to go around and listen to words you used to see written on fences."

Al Hoxie...

"Unlike some films, cowboy pictures are pure, clean and honorable."

Harry Lauter...

"We all have problems, and we need some release. Cowboy and action pictures offer that. As a friend of mine said—'I'm a working stiff and when I go to the movies I don't want to see a story about a guy whose wife has psychiatric problems. *My wife* has psychiatric problems...'"

Robert Fuller...

"I'm a man born 100 years too late. If I had my choice I'd live in 1850. Either I'd be the sheriff, or the worst outlaw who ever lived. When I strap on a gun, I want to play the West like it really was."